A FACE.

From The Overland Monthly.

Hast thou eaten of pomegranates that thine eyes
Hold the look of one who ever faintly sighs
For a land of blessed shadow, strangely sweet,
Where a king in days long vanished stayed thy feet?

Hast thou eaten of pomegranates that thy mouth
Bears the stain of that rare fruitage from the South?
Is it that which through thy pulses soft has stirred,
O'er thy cheeks its red wine flooding at a word?

Some day as we stand a-dreaming there shall ring
Clang from silver-bitted horses of the king,
We shall turn to give thee question, wonder-eyed,
But to find that thou hast vanished from our side.

O'er the belted bees' sweet humming there shall fall,
Far and near throughout the morning, tender call,
As we wander, heart a-hungered, for some trace
In the meadows and the pastures of thy face.

Mourning Ceres long went calling, worn and faint,
Till at last the gods gave answer to her plaint;
But for us no sleepless Ida watch doth keep,—
All the old gray gods of Hellas lie asleep.

Back the silver-bitted horses ne'er shall bring,
She who ate of red pomegranates with the king.

LUCY E. TILLEY.

DEATH IN LIFE.

Some miles from the hamlet of Montegut, in Louisiana, in the forest of Terrebonne, is a rude board hut, the dwelling of an old man who lives there alone, harmlessly mad. The last time I saw him was on a cloudy summer afternoon, a year ago. I found him seated on the trunk of a felled tree, among his melon vines, contemplating with absent gaze the green fruit nestled in their beds of hairy leaves and curling tendrils. His greeting, as always, was full of gentleness, but the serenity of his countenance did not conceal that he had sorrowed much; that his sorrow had fed on his brain. A pathetic dignity invested the old man, which called up in one a reverential feeling, tempered, however, with a pity that brought unbidden moisture to the eyes. Of any such feeling on your part he was entirely unconscious. Nor did he betray by any word or action that he suffered, much less that he looked for sympathy. I do not believe he needed pity. He had ceased to remember the great tribulation through which he had passed, and he now waited passively for a heaven he had not forgotten, though the only sign he gave of its remembrance was a meditative ejaculation, uttered rarely, "The good God! the good God!"

On this day I speak of I remained with him but a few minutes, for a storm was brewing, and I had a long journey to make before I could reach home. After I had bidden him good-by and had gone on my way, something impelled me to turn and take a last look at him. He still sat on the trunk of the felled tree, his hands folded on his lap, his head thrown back, his white beard sweeping his bare breast, his eyes gazing longingly on the pitchy sky seen through the rifts in the laced branches of the trees, the sullen reverberations of the thunder in his ears.

I.

Alcide whistled cheerily, as only a light-hearted Créole can whistle, and the tune he whistled was "Dixie." We all whistled and sang "Dixie" in 1860, and we have not done with the old tune yet. Only a matter of great importance could make happy Alcide pause in his whistling. He bent nearer to the mirror before which he stood, the whistle grew fainter, his lips unpuckered. After a moment his face broke into a smile, and "Dixie" trilled and shrilled again. He had parted his hair to his perfect satisfaction, and he hoped to Jeanne d'Naudry's also.

There had been much talk about Alcide Beriot and Jeanne d'Naudry. Jeanne, the prettiest girl in all the La Fourche country; a girl, too, who would have an excellent dot—$15,000 and a good slice of a sugar plantation. She did not want for offers, Jeanne. One of the most importunate was Armand Lemaire, but him she would not look at. Armand was poor, you see, and he was nowhere beside Alcide Beriot for good looks. But with all his good-looks and devil-may-care good-humor, Alcide was afraid before Jeanne. He had no cause to be afraid; at all times Jeanne had a pleasant word for him and a shake of her hand—the hand she favored no man with unless it were her father or her brother. And the misery Alcide would inflict upon himself! There was that love-vine—You do not know what a love-vine is? It is a parasitic plant; its tendrils a pinkish white, its leaflets whitish yellow, and it grows on the branches of trees. Young men gather a tendril and throw it on a tree-branch beneath the window of one they would woo. If their love is returned, the vine will flourish; if not, the tendril dies. Alcide must needs throw a tendril on a branch of the orange-tree that used to look into Jeanne's bedroom. Next day the love-vine was a shrivelled thread. Alcide could not have taken it more to heart if Jeanne had publicly flouted him. How he ever heartened himself to ask her to be his wife was a mystery to us all. He did, though, and everybody was glad for Alcide's sake—except one, Armand Lemaire.

Although his happiness was but a day old, he could scarcely realize that he had feared to speak to Jeanne, so bold of heart was he now. His mother and his sisters greeted him with a sort of reverence when he passed out to mount his horse, arrayed to spend an evening at the d'Naudry plantation. Was he not the only son, and was he not about to take a wife?

Chee wee, chee wee, chee wee, trip, trip, trip—auk, auk, auk, pree, pree, pree. White, Bob White, see soo—soo—oo—oo, sang the mocking birds, rejoicing in the light of the round, argent moon. The zephyr stirred through the magnolias and perfumed itself with the flowers it kissed. The stars of the South in the deep purple heavens throbbed as they do not in the cold North, where they twinkle; throbbed, keeping time with the sluggish flow of the serpentine bayou. Soft was the moonlight on Jeanne's fair face, soft on the dark forest, on the cold breast of the distant lagoon.

Jeanne leaned over the balustrade of the gallery and looked down at Alcide, as he looked up to bid her good-night. "Jeanne," he said in a hushed voice, and for a moment the mocking-birds were still, as if to listen to him—"Jeanne, how can you love me?"

Her deep black eyes met his dreamily, and her bosom heaved. She did not answer his question, but said: "It is light as the day; the road is like a white magnolia leaf."

"And the cane-fields way off at the end are like the gulf on a summer's eve." Jeanne," he pursued thoughtfully, as he unconsciously stroked the down on his lip, "that is our road, all white, the end smooth sailing over a summer sea."

Her arm hung listlessly over the balustrade, and he caught her hand and pressed it to his lips. She withdrew it gently, and reminded him of the lateness of the hour. "You will wait till I bring my horse around, Jeanne?" he asked.

Away beyond the long, broad fields of billowy, moon-silvered cane was the house of Armand Lemaire. A light was in one of its upper windows. Jeanne was gazing at the light, and without removing her eyes, she said she would wait.

It would be hard to picture a handsomer youth than slender, graceful Alcide Beriot on his black horse, as, bending down in the moonlight, he took Jeanne's outstretched hand to bid her good-night. "One kiss, Jeanne," he implored in a whisper. She offered him her white cheek, and what man would say she was not sweetest to kiss, and what girl would say it was not well to be kissed by him? The mocking-birds chorused, Alcide whistled the merry tune of the "Bayou Blue Waltz," the hoofs of his horse went thud, thud over the loam, and Jeanne, staring after him, let her eyes snap, and whispered to herself, "Betise!"

II.

No one was prepared to say how it came to be that the Lemaires were poor. They possessed excellent land, their crops never failed, the men were sober, and looked well to it that their hands did not slur their work. The truth was, they lacked money-sense. Like most folk that lacked this sense, they were a charming family. The widow Lemaire was forty, plump, fair-haired, smooth of skin, fresh and hearty as a healthy child, and her accomplishments were without end. She could sing, she played the organ in the church, the piano at home, and dance!—she was the model dancer for half the country round. All Creoles make good coffee, but the fragrant aroma of Madame Lemaire's coffee once enjoyed, returned to you in your happiest dreams.

In spite of the handsome father who had begotten him, and the beautiful mother who gave him birth, Armand Lemaire was not remarkable for his good looks. Strong, well-built, with regular features, there was something unpleasing in his face. Was it the stolid stubbornness of his character that showed itself on his mouth and in his eyes? Yet he was a good fellow, had hosts of friends, never quarrelled, and they said if any one offended him he never forgave. Just now he was not on the best of terms with Alcide Beriot. There had been nothing like a quarrel; only when he met Alcide out riding, or at the house of an acquaintance, he barely noticed his sometime friend's attempts to draw him into conversation, failing to comprehend Alcide's good-natured endeavor not to appear too happy in his presence. Madame Lemaire was quick to perceive the change that took place in her son so soon after Jeanne promised to be Alcide's wife. She did not ask him why it was that he gave curt answers when she spoke to him, why he spent so much of his time abroad. She did not even ask him how it was that he, so temperate, came home one night drunken and abusive. She forgave him everything, but her heart was wroth with Jeanne, whom she blamed for Armand's wicked transformation.

Nor did she conceal her anger from Jeanne. "You are a coquette, Jeanne," she accused, when, on one of her visits to the d'Naudry plantation, she found the girl alone. "For more than a year you led Armand on, and all the while you cast eyes at Alcide Beriot." For answer, Jeanne burst into tears and blurted out that Armand had never spoken to her of love. Madame Lamaire watched the girl curiously, her good-natured face broadening into a smile. "My poor child," she exclaimed, and the next moment Jeanne's head rested on her sympathetic bosom, and Jeanne's secret was confided to her.

How long the rays of the sun that stretched across the fields of sugar-cane to touch the black trunks of the cypress, to seek for every crevice in the laced boughs of waxen green whereby to gain entrance to the forest! The gentle wind had come far from the gulf, but its breath was still sweet and fresh with the odor of cool, briny water. A cow and its calf, that had wandered into the road away from herders and herd, stopped to gaze stupidly at the tall rose-bushes that formed a hedge between the garden of the d'Naudrys and the outside world. In the orangery adjoining the garden the blue-jays flitted and balanced themselves on the dark-green branches laden with golden fruit, the red top-knot of a woodpecker glowed against the black trunk of a date-palm as he tapped on the bark.

"No, Armand, I cannot tell him," said Jeanne, as she leaned against a gnarled orange-tree partly for support, partly because the lines of her figure, all in white, showed well against the blackish green background. "And if I did, what then? Father would not consent."

"If you loved me, Jeanne, you would not seek reasons not to marry me," remonstrated Armand.

She looked at him wistfully; then, drawing a long sigh, her eyes closed, her arms fell helplessly. "You must arrange it all," she murmured.

He sprang forward to embrace her, but she shrank aside. "No, no," she breathed. "I cannot let you touch me! Armand, Armand, why did you not speak before?"

"Because I am poor: because you gave me no encouragement," he cried bitterly. "My God!" he continued, "you treated me that badly that mother had almost to swear to it before I would believe that you loved me; and after all, do you love me?"

"You know I do," faltered Jeanne; "but I'm afraid."

"Afraid!"

"Afraid of Alcide; he will——" she stopped abruptly. Alcide was coming from the house—rather, he came dancing down the path—slender, handsome, light of foot, like a young god rejoicing, he came toward them.

"It was at this moment I spoke of you, monsieur," said Armand coldly. Jeanne, the finger-tips of one hand pressed to her lips, her head bent, drew closer to her tree.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Alcide laughing heartily. "Why, Armand, my boy, what is it?" And he laid his hand affectionately on Armand's neck.

"O Armand, Armand!" cried Jeanne. Armand had struck down the friendly hand.

Alcide's face was white to his very lips, his muscles hardened, his speech thickened. "I do not quarrel in the presence of women," he said.

Jeanne did not understand him. She seized Armand's hand and implored him not to come to blows about her. Alcide, with great respect, but with all of a lover's insistance, commanded her to go to the house. "If you love me, go, Jeanne," he said.

"But I do not love you," sobbed Jeanne.

The only sound was the preet, preet of the jays among the orange-boughs, the suppressed sobs of Jeanne.

"Do you love that man?" Alcide asked, at last. Jeanne hesitated. "You must answer me," Alcide insisted.

Still she hesitated, and it was only the fear of what Armand might say that in the end made her bend her head in assent.

Often afterward, Jeanne said to Armand she could still hear the groan of despair Alcide uttered. It found an echo even in the heart of Armand, for he said: "Alcide, my friend, pardon my rudeness to you. It is this, Alcide: Jeanne and I have loved one another for a long, long while, and I dared not speak: you know, my friend, how poor we are at Mignonette plantation."

Jeanne wept anew; Alcide felt as if every drop of his blood was rushing to his head.

"How unhappy I have made you. But you have deceived me, Jeanne," he groaned.

"I will be your wife, if you insist," she sobbed.

No, Jeanne, not that," he said quietly. "Now, Jeanne, leave Armand and me; we wish to talk—no, no, there is no quarrel—we are friends. Armand will go to the house presently."

Her eyes asked Armand for counsel, and his told her to do as Alcide said.

Jeanne looked earnestly at Alcide; her cheeks flushed, and she said: "You are good, Alcide—how good!" He smiled, somewhat of bitterness in his smile. Her face now flamed and she hurried away, but when she reached the garden gate, her hand on the latch, she turned to look at the two men. They were deep in conversation, and presently she heard Alcide laugh, and then Armand grasped his hand warmly. Which was strange, Armand not being of a demonstrative nature.

Wonder was expressed when Armand Lemaire paid off the mortgages on Mignonette plantation. No one connected Alcide Beriot's trip to New-Orleans with Armand's being supplied with ready money. When it was known that Armand, and not Alcide, was to marry Jeanne d'Naudry, then people not only wondered, but talked without exhaustion.

III.

The spring of 1861. The square of the little town of Houma; a tall pole erected in its centre from which flutters the flag of the Confederacy. A crowd of cheering men and boys, women and girls; a band playing "Dixie"; horsemen shouting, their horses plunging; vehicles of every description, their occupants for the most part gayly dressed girls, who laugh and sing and clap their hands with an exuberance of joy that will not be repressed. Pette Beriot, from her perch on a spring-wagon, calls, "Alcide!" He comes running, and she hands down to him a great wreath of roses. His arm passed through the wreath, hand over hand, he climbs the pole. A great hush has fallen over the crowd. Hand over hand—once he slips, recovers himself—up, up, his eyes always looking upward—he has reached the top, the wreath crowns the flag. Frantic with love and enthusiasm for the new-born banner, they cheer, they yell, they shout; the band plays, the report of firearms mingles with the chant of an improvised choir. Fort Moultrie's guns have been heard in far-off Terrebonne, and even as they sing their hallelujahs of victory to come the banner's crown of roses wilts and withers in the unkindly heat.

In those days war was the one thing talked of. The very boys longed to be in the ranks, and to their rage and shame their longings were laughed at. What a consolation it would have been to them to know that their time to don the gray was near at hand! But the men of all ages; they hurried to join the army, their mothers and sisters, their wives and daughters, rejoicing to see them go. Armand Lemaire held his wife to his heart, his mother smiled through her tears, and he was off—Captain Lemaire—to head his company. One of that company was Lieutenant Beriot—Alcide, who had kept himself aloof from his friends for months past.

IV.

Alcide Beriot carried with him to battle a wound more serious than any the foe could inflict; a wound that would not kill him, that did cause him constant pain. If by any chance the pain showed signs of wearing itself out, the sight of his captain renewed his torture. Were not the lips that commanded or greeted him lips that had given a lover's and a husband's kisses to Jeanne? Were not his arms the arms that had held her in warmest embrace?

His sorrow did not make him reckless; he did not shun danger, for he was brave; neither did he court it, for when his country was made he would have another duty to perform—his mother to care for, and something told him that Mignonette plantation would again need his help. Months and years passed by, and the days of them that were not scarlet were few. News from home, always seldom to come, at last came not at all. Louisiana, almost from the beginning, had been one vast battle-field. Now the Terrebonne was held by the foe, again in the hands of her friends, till at last there were none left but boys to defend the homes of their fathers.

Perhaps it was harder for Armand to endure life without a word from home than it was for Alcide. When he had put on his coat of gray, Jeanne had been his bride for but two short months. It would have been better for these two men if they could have talked to one another of home; but they could not, their hearts being too full of Jeanne.

The splendor of the Confederate flag had taken the shape of a cross of stars, in whose shadow a nation wept and prayed and fought, when Alcide for a third time was to show his great love for Jeanne. He had given up his right to her that she might be happy with Armand. He had freed Mignonette plantation from debt in order that Jeanne's father should have no reason to refuse her hand to Armand. And now he was to be called off to risk his life for her sake. It was in one of the last struggles of a dying nation, a struggle in which wearied, foot-sore, starving, outfought men battled in the shadow of defeat, Death the conqueror.

The night before the battle Armand went to Alcide's quarters on business that concerned the morrow. He found Alcide intent in prayer, and he knelt beside him; and the two prayed together as, when boys, they had prayed side by side in the chapel of Mary. When they rose from their knees they grasped one another by the hand, and Alcide's heart was stirred for Armand with the love of friendship that had once been so warm. They spoke together of Jeanne freely, and Alcide received many messages to carry her, should tomorrow be Armand's last. They had been in so many battles that it could not have been the thought of the morrow alone that made them again warm friends. Could it in some shadowy way have come to their knowledge that for one of them the night would never be again?

Before daybreak the dull boom of the cannonade had begun, and the April sun rose from behind a rolling cloud of smoke, broken by hissing shell that burst and threw out phosphorescent lights where the smoke was blackest. A streak of intermittent flame marked the spot where stood the cannoneers. To the right a sudden flame shot upward, and scattered broadcast starry sparks that faded and died in the skyward-coiling smoke. The cabin, Alcide's quarters, was ablaze. Hotter and hotter grew the galling fire, the air loud with the detonation of shot, the screaming of shell, the crashing of timber, and up rose the rebel yell, sturdy and clear.

Could that battery be taken? "Fix bayonets—charge!" the order was shouted. On, on, into the face of the storm of grape-shot and minie-balls, into the red hell of death. Officers and men are falling like cane before the knife of the reaper. Alcide bears a charmed life. The color-bearer is down; a comrade seizes the flag; "My God!" his heart shall never beat again; and now it is Alcide who flaunts in flame and smoke the cross of stars. Beyond a dense pine underbrush, through rifts in the fire storm, were the victory-flushed enemy. This to the front. Feebler rose the rebel yell from the thinning ranks—a hushed cry of dismay. From the rear, and to the right and left, shot and shell fell fast.

"Save yourself who can!" On every side the enemy. Alcide stands by his friend; a sabre flashes downward, eager for Armand. Shall Alcide go home to tell Jeanne that Armand is dead? No! His eyes swim; keen has the blade cut, nigh to his brain.

And when he woke the night mists from the river were falling, and his head was pillowed on the dead heart of Armand.

V.

Late on an August afternoon in 1865 a man plodded painfully along the bayou road in the direction of Mignonette plantation. He wore tattered rags, his feet bulged from out his broken boots, and his hat covered a head about which was wound a much-soiled muslin bandage. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, but kept his head bent, his eyes cast on the ground as he walked. Only once, when passing what had been the d'Naudry plantation, he let his eyes glance at the blackened ruins of the dwelling, at the gardens and fields, now an easy prey to the weeds. A sob and a groan escaped him, he struck his hands together twice or thrice, and then made such feeble haste on his way as his sorely tried feet would permit.

The land was just recovering from a flood caused when the invaders cut the levees. Here the road was thick with untrodden dust, there ankle-deep in mud and water. The swift-blowing breeze scattered abroad miasmatic vapors, and the swampy woods were alive with the croaking of frogs. The hot sun looked in the bayous, and its waters were red as the blood that Alcide had shed for naught.

The man had gone about half a mile from the d'Naudry plantation when he stopped his halting gait to look about for the road he knew led to Mignonette. For a moment he thought he must have passed it, and then he understood. It had changed, as had all things else in Terrebonne. What had been a road was now a tangled mass of underbrush. With much difficulty he made his way through the brush, for the briers caught at his rags as if they would detain him, treacherous vines tangled his feet. At last he stood in what had once been a garden, before a house with a gallery on three of its sides.

A woman who had been sitting on the gallery rose when she perceived the man, and advanced to meet him, a boy of some four years clinging to the skirts of her washed-out calico gown. "What is it you want?" she called, and tried in the gathering darkness to make out who the man was.

"You do not know me, Jeanne?" asked the man, as he limped forward to where she stood on the gallery steps.

She hesitated a moment, then said quietly, extending her hand for him to take: "Alcide? Yes, I know you now; I was not expecting any one. Armand, he is coming soon?" she continued, her voice wavering.

Again Alcide made that motion of beating together his hands. By a great effort he controlled himself, and was about to speak when she interrupted him to say: "You need not tell me if it hurts you—Armand is dead."

He stared at her, helplessly, and no word of comfort came to him to say. "Won't you come up on the gallery and rest yourself, Alcide?" she asked absently. He was about to ascend the steps when, suddenly, she threw up her hands and cried, "Armand! Armand!" and fell to the floor. He snatched up a gourd half-full of water and laved her forehead and hands, and even in his distress he noted that his dust-stained fingers soiled her worn face. All the while the boy wept and stormed at him for having killed his mother. For some moments he almost believed the boy to be right, that Jeanne was dead; but after a little she opened her eyes and strove to rise, only to fall back on his supporting arm.

"Jeanne," he said huskily, "let us see if, between us, you cannot get to your bed." Then he raised her in his arms and staggered with his burden into a sleeping-room opening onto the gallery, and laid her on the bed. The child clambered up to her side; she put her arms about him and let him weep against her neck, making no effort to quiet him.

It was now dark, and Alcide searched for means to make a light. Finding nothing, he felt his way to the bedside, and asked Jeanne where was the lamp, or had she candles. "Pardon me for disturbing you," he said; "I am very stupid, but I can find nothing."

At the sound of his voice the boy hushed his weeping, and Jeanne said: "There is no oil; I have no candles. There is no food, either, and you must be hungry," she added.

"Now, Jeanne," announced Alcide, striving to impart a sprightliness to the tone of his voice, "I am going over to the store. Is the store there yet?"

"Yes," she answered. "A stranger has it; I have forgotten his name. I have no money," she faltered.

"Never mind; never mind," he said soothingly. "You stay as you are until I return."

More than two hours had elapsed before Alcide returned with a little stock of provisions and the small necessaries missing at Mignonette. Jeanne had kindled a fire in the dismantled parlor—the house had been damp ever since the overflow, she explained—and the child was asleep in the adjoining bed-room. She did not appear to have noticed that he had been gone long, that he looked weary, that he was lame. Neither did she, absorbed in her grief, offer to help him when he set to work to prepare a meal, boiling water for the coffee, broiling a slice of ham. It was not till he pressed her to eat that she again showed consciousness of his presence. Then, though she refused the food, she thanked him, and roused the child to bring him to the table. The boy ate ravenously. "He has had no food to-day," she said, impassively.

Though she dwelt deep in his heart, though he longed to be able to comfort her, he respected her grief with a great reverence that forbade him to speak, for he felt that words would but torment her.

After the boy had eaten, she made a feint of clearing the table, but gave it up, and went to a chair on the gallery, where she sat and let the child slumber in her arms. After a time Alcide said: "I'll put the boy to bed; you must be tired holding him."

"No," she answered simply, "he does not tire me; he is all I have left of Armand." Then something like a sob choked her further utterance.

It was after this that she asked him how Armand had lost his life; and when he had told her how bravely Armand had fought, and how a spent ball had marked him for death, saying nothing of how he, Alcide, had offered his life in vain to save her man for her, Jeanne's tongue loosened, and she told him of the death of his mother, of which he had not heard. Then she went on to say that few of the old neighbors were left, that those who were left were nearly as destitute as herself. They talked late into the night, and when she left him Alcide stretched himself on a cushioned bench and, wearied out, fell into a dreamless sleep.

VI.

Alcide set to work with a will to remake a home in the desolation he found at his plantation of Azalea. In this he was heartened by the thought that success meant comfort and independence for Jeanne and her boy, the little Armand. The first thing he did after the miserable night spent at Mignonette was to have Jeanne and the boy taken to an aunt of his in Houma, where they would be cared for. (Madame Lemaire had opened a millinery shop on a small scale in New-Orleans.) To this aunt's house he went every Sunday, seeing little of Jeanne, but much of the boy, to whom he became greatly attached.

As he possessed but little ready money, he could cultivate his plantation in part only. Still, by persevering effort, sheer bodily toil, he did make a humble home, did lay by a small competency for Armand's widow and son. People wondered, as the years passed by, that Jeanne and Alcide did not marry. It would be such a good thing for them both, and for the boy. Nothing could be more proper. The aunt, knowing what Alcide wished, thought that Jeanne showed a mean spirit to suffer Alcide to support her and not give him the right to call her wife. That is, if Alcide had asked her, as she suspected he had. She was right in her suspicion. Two years after he had been home-building Alcide did entreat Jeanne to come to the home ready to receive her. She heard what he had to say, then told him she would never marry. "When I go to Armand," she said, "I must be as he left me; and indeed, Alcide, I am grateful to you. What would his boy be but for you? But, Alcide, I cannot, cannot love you in that way."

As had once before happened, Alcide felt the blood rush to his head, and, without a word to urge Jeanne to change her mind, he went back to Azalea. For nearly two weeks he kept within doors, seeing no one save Pierre Coreil, who worked the plantation on shares with him, and Coreil as seldom and for as short a time as the urgency of the business on hand would permit. A gradual but marked change was taking place in Alcide. Always notable for sweetness of temper, he now was subject at long intervals to almost uncontrollable fits of rage, followed by hours of moroseness and remorse. On one occasion he quarrelled with Coreil, and it was whispered he had drawn a pistol on the man. Whether it was that Coreil understood the nature of his partner's disease and pitied him, or whether it was through policy, he did not resent the outrage put upon him, and when questioned about it denied the story, though there were witnesses ready to swear that they saw the pistol in Alcide's hand.

On another occasion Alcide's aunt, partly to satisfy her curiosity as to whether or not Alcide had spoken to Jeanne, partly from a sincere desire to bring the twain together, urged on him the importance of Jeanne's position in life being fixed. "She ought to marry for the boy's sake, if for nothing else," she said; and added, in a half-whisper, "If you are not careful, Alcide, Raoul Danjean will get ahead of you. He is casting eyes that way now."

Then Alcide seized his aunt by the arm so roughly that she cried out with pain. "He did foam at the mouth like a dog," she related afterward. "What did he say? Now, that is what I call droll! He said nothing, only pierced me with his eyes; and I tell you I was glad, yes, when he let me go. I cried through fright for an hour afterward."

A week after this scene with his aunt Alcide came to her, very penitent, and begged her pardon. "Has Danjean been here of late?" he asked when the pardon had been granted gladly.

The aunt was afraid to answer, for the truth was Danjean was at that moment on the back gallery with Jeanne. Did Alcide but listen he would hear them conversing. He did hear them, for he said quietly, to his aunt's great relief: "Oh! he is here; Danjean is a good fellow; I'll go back and see him." And he walked by her, through the broad passageway on to the gallery.

Jeanne sat in a low rocking-chair, her hands folded on the sewing spread on her lap, her head bent, her cheeks flushed. Danjean sat opposite Jeanne, his eyes eagerly watching her, his body bent forward in an attitude of absorbed attention. Outside in the garden the boy, Armand, chased a butterfly, shouting and laughing at the top of his voice.

Alcide greeted them abruptly; dragged a chair forward to seat himself; changed his mind and set it against the wall. "What is it, Alcide?" asked Danjean. "You do not look well; is it fever?"

Alcide did not look well, and he began to look savage. He drew in his breath and said to Jeanne, "Is it true?"

She was frightened. He had been kind to her; she had been unappreciative, and perhaps she might have married Danjean. Who can tell? "Is what true?" she asked, her eyes appealing to him to restrain himself.

"No! I will have it out," was his answer. "You are going to——" he hesitated, and Danjean spoke for her. "You wish to know if Jeanne is to be my wife? I have just asked her. You have a right to know, Alcide; but you have not a right to be brutal."

Alcide gazed apprehensively from one to the other; then something like a smile, a smile not without its pathos, trembled on his lips. "I beg Jeanne's pardon," he said gently; "I should not have interfered; I will go away, that she may give her answer."

Danjean sprang to his feet, extended his hand and cried: "Alcide, there never was a man like you. You won't take my hand?" for Alcide drew back.

"No! no!" he shouted. "I will not take your hand; I could kill you, Danjean, but I cannot be another Judas. My little Armand." His voice trembled, and he stooped to caress the boy, who, attracted by the loud voices, had left the pursuit of the butterfly to steal to Alcide's side. Alcide brought him toys and sweets, was always gentle with him, had often begged him off from a punishment the aunt would have inflicted.

The presence of the child quieted the storm, and in the calm Jeanne said: "I am sorry for all this; I have so often said I shall never marry——" Here she broke down. "It is cruel to torment me so, Monsieur Danjean," she pouted, after a moment to recover herself.

Danjean, a shadow of annoyance on his face, strode to where she sat. "Will madame pardon me if I say I think she does not know her own mind?" he said with a low bow, and walked away.

The child was now begging Alcide for sweets. "Bonbons, 'Cede, bonbons," he cried.

For once he did not heed the boy, but looked sadly at Jeanne for an explanation of Danjean's parting words. "Did he have reason to believe you cared for him, Jeanne?" he asked.

"Tut! no; as if I could care for him after Armand!" she exclaimed, and added carelessly: "If it were any one, it would be you, Alcide."

The veins of his neck, his forehead, and clinched hands swelled, and he said, his voice hushed from the emotion he could scarcely control: "Will you marry me, Jeanne?"

Yesterday she would have said no; to-day she felt driven to say yes. "I will be your wife after three months," she promised.

He looked dazedly at her; then, a glad smile on his lips, he cried: "May the good God reward you, Jeanne. You love me a little?"

She had been a spoiled child, a spoiled wife, and all her troubles had not made her less selfish. "I do not love you, but it is proper I marry you, for everything I have comes from you——"

He held up his hand to check her speech. "You have spoken enough," he said calmly; "I shall not come again!" And having kissed the child, he went away, in the passage pushing aside the aunt who would have stopped him to talk.

VII.

It was a sickly winter. The land, not properly drained since the cutting of the levee, filled the air with fever, and many were stricken down—among them Jeanne.

For months past Alcide had not left his plantation, avoiding his fellows and avoided by them, for it began to be whispered abroad that Alcide Beriot was not right in his mind. Some said that he had been more or less mad ever since he had received a sabre-cut in the war. But when he heard that Jeanne was dying he saddled his horse and rode to town. Those who met him on the way remarked that he had a strange look—a haunted look.

They took him immediately to the chamber where she lay, for, as the aunt told him, he was just in time to see Jeanne before she died. "The priest has been," she whispered, "and Jeanne has asked for you, Alcide." He heard her gravely, as fitted the occasion, but gave no sign of undue distress, and his aunt congratulated herself that his heart was not "pierced."

Unconscious of the solemnity of the time, the boy romped on the floor with his pet kitten. At sight of Alcide, he called out to him to know why it was he stayed so long away, and had he brought him bonbons?

Jeanne feebly stretched out her hand to him, and as he held it, one would have said that it was indifference he felt, so little of emotion was expressed in his face. "Alcide," she whispered laboredly, "my boy, little Armand!"

"He shall be to me as my son," he replied.

The smile of thanks she would have given him was interrupted by death.

He knelt beside the bed and drew her face to his. Never before had his lips touched hers, and their coldness froze his heart and his brain.

VIII.

Because Alcide Beriot had been looked upon for so long a time as a man not in his senses, the aunt demurred when he came, after the burial of Jeanne, to take the boy, Armand, to Azalea. The child was best with her, she said, and the neighbors coincided with her, and had it not been for the parish cure, Pere Chasse, the aunt would have had her way. "You should let the child go to Alcide," argued the good priest; "It will be best for the boy. Alcide has a brave heart; the child will be all the better for being with him. And Alcide, too; he loves the child; that is what the brave fellow wants—love; and Armand cannot help but love him. You shall see it will be all right."

So little Armand went to Azalea, and for a time it was as Pere Chasse said it would be. The new home, where his will was law, was a happy change for the child from the restrictions of Tante Louise. In a way he returned the love of his benefactor, and Alcide, no longer morose, youthened in the light of the child's countenance, was gladdened by his childish caresses. He had something to live for, and as long as he felt that he had this something his mind was clear.

The long, long summers of fruits and flowers and soft southern gales, the short winters of north winds that lost their chill before they reached the Terrebonne, went one by one till Armand was sixteen. And every passing year brought less of comfort to Alcide, for he saw the thing for which he lived growing more and more estranged. "He is sixteen, he should go to the college," advised the neighbors, and to college he was sent.

Alcide waited anxiously for the vacations, the old moroseness seizing on him till he was avoided as he had been once before. In the days before the day on which Armand was to return, he spent all his time in preparations for the boy's having happy holidays. The watch and silver-mounted gun Armand had long desired were bought in New-Orleans, and such a horse as was to be the boy's was not in all Terrebonne. Rouge et Noir was a mettlesome beast, not well used to the saddle. "I'll give you a lesson before sundown, my beauty," Alcide declared on the morning the horse was brought to Azalea. It was a hot day in July, and when he returned late in the afternoon from the field, where he had been overseeing, he was heated, tired, his head burning—not at all in a humor for giving the promised lesson. Nevertheless it would be given, for on the morrow Armand would be home.

No one was about, so Alcide himself led the horse from the stable. A masterful animal, the sun forming arcs of light on his polished coat as he danced across the bit of greensward, following Alcide's lead. Neither the horse nor the man were in a mood for trifling, neither in a mood to be conquered. Rouge et Noir reared, his long tail swept the ground viciously, he trumpeted his defiance. Alcide set his teeth, grasped the bridle, held Rouge et Noir's mouth as in a vice, and with his mad strength slowly, surely drew the animal down on all fours. Rouge et Noir gave a sudden lunge to the off; Alcide's vice-like grasp righted him. Quicker than thought he vaulted onto Rouge et Noir's back and dug his knees into the animal's angrily palpitating sides. Down went his head, aloft he flung it, again he trumpeted his rage; a lunge forward, again erect, and then he tore in giddy circles about the greensward. His hoofs rooted up the grass, flung the mould; he swung Alcide against the palings of the enclosure, not unseating him, and ever tighter and tighter Alcide drew the rein. Less swift and less swift Rouge et Noir's gallop of fire. Tenser and tenser the hold of Alcide. Slower and slower the trot, with now and again a wild spurt for freedom. And now sighing and panting and sweating, his flanks steaming and foam-flecked and quivering, Rouge et Noir stands head hung and conquered.

If Alcide succeeded in conquering Rouge et Noir, the conquest finished what had begun years before in the d'Naudry orangery, when he discovered Jeanne's love for Armand Lemaire. On that day his reason received a shock. Bitter disappointment followed hard on the gangrened heels of trouble, and drove Reason, with violence stoutly resisted, from her dwelling-place in an honest brain that was subservient to his high-strung, honorable heart, and on this July afternoon, when Coreil came up to Azalea to consult with Alcide as to whether or not the gang of hands should be added to, he found the plantation's master a-bed in the delirium of fever. Alcide arose from this bed of oblivion a harmless, witless man, nothing left him save a capacity for suffering only less than infinite.

Armand had returned from college while Alcide lay wooing death. He had watched by the bed of the man to whom he owed everything in a perfunctory way, but even so little of duty as he gave was very wearisome to him. Neither did the knowledge that Alcide's recovery was rapid since he watched bring much of comfort to him, nor did it rejoice him to know how greatly he was loved. It was harder for him when Alcide got about and healthened in the delight of his company, more even than in the balm of air and sunshine. He was young. What pleasure could he find in the companionship of this broken man?

IX.

Coreil now took entire charge of the plantation, and Alcide submitted tamely to all he suggested. It was well, for Coreil was an upright man. Now it was, too, that the aunt and her people in Houma urged that Armand leave Azalea to come and live with them. They spoke gently to Alcide of this, and he said, Leave it to the boy. But the aunt suggested, Let there be a family council; and Alcide, taking a long while to consider, his brain working slowly, agreed. Then the aunt, and her people, and Coreil—as business manager he was one of the family—met in the long sitting-room at Azalea.

They all felt a constraint in Alcide's presence, an awkwardness and a shame for what they were about to do, although they were sincere in their belief that Armand should leave Azalea. No one spoke; each waited for another to begin, when Alcide rose from his chair and said: "My friends, I do not see the need of your putting yourselves to trouble about a matter that, after all, concerns Armand alone. Let him be the judge; it is but fair and just."

They stared at him in amazement. The man was transformed. His eyes shone with the light of reason; love for Jeanne's child had kindled the flame. He appeared to have grown young again; not that he was so old in years, but trouble had aged him. Once more he was the handsome youth who had wooed Jeanne under the white moon.

He turned to Armand, and in a gentle voice, a smile on his lips, bade him decide for himself whether it were best that he remain at Azalea or go to the aunt in Houma. And he cautioned him not to bear in mind that he, Alcide Beriot, loved him as a brother, or as his father would have loved him had he lived, but to decide as would best forward his, Armand's, interests in the future.

Armand looked away from him out of the window, on the white road, the swaying oaks and stunted palms; and the music of violins, the sound of tripping feet rang in his ears, the laughter of girls and the chorus of boyish voices. He did not turn his face as he said: "I do not mind for myself, but I think it is best for you all that I go to Houma to live."

The smile that flickered on Alcide's face left it; but, tuned by his gentle heart, the voice was sweet and gentle that approved of Armand's choice.

The next day, when Coreil came to Azalea, Alcide had disappeared. A fruitless search was made for him. Months passed by, and then a party of hunters for deer came across him dwelling in a hut under an old oak-tree. They spoke to him of his friends; he remembered nothing. His wits were entirely gone, his speech indistinct. When they tried to induce him to return with them, he entreated them so earnestly to leave him alone that they desisted. Others who came to him were met by the same entreaties. He wished to be alone. His property had been settled on Armand Lemaire, he was content to be alone, so they granted him his wish, but they were carful to see that he did not want.

The rushing wind sweeps the ever-green foliage of the oaks into great swaths; the storm tosses and swirls the long, gray-bearded mosses; the majestic magnolia sheds a myriad of ivory petals over the lush ripe grass, and whitens the bosom of the turbulent bayou; the lightning quivers and flashes in the dense heavy shadows; the thunder claps harshly jubilant in the far-away distance, and Beriot, unmoved, sits patiently waiting.—(Harold Dijon, in The Catholic World.

WHY THE STOVE WAS SO HIGH.

A SIMPLE EXPLANATION.

From The San Francisco Argonaut.

There were five of us in the party—six, counting Long Tom, the guide. After two days' hard climbing, which the burros endured with exemplary fortitude, we arrived at the little valley high up in the mountains, through which threaded the trout-stream.

"Jest you all go over into the cabin there and make yourself comf'ble, while I 'tend to gettin' this stuff unpacked," said Long Tom; "there ain't no one there. My pardner, he's down below."

"The cabin appears to be two cabins," said the colonel, as we approached it.

"That is for economy in ridge-poles," said the doctor; "sleeping apartments on one side and kitchen on the other. In the space between, you keep your fishing-tackle and worms."

We entered the right-hand section of the twin-cabin, which proved to be the kitchen side. There was not much furniture—a table of hewn logs, a chair of bent saplings, and a rough bench.

However, we did not notice such furniture as there was, for each member of the party, as he stepped over the high threshold, had his attention instantly attracted by the stove, and a brief roundelay of ejaculations went along the group.

"Well, that staggers me," said the stock-broker.

"H'm," said the professor, in a mysterious tone, and rubbed his chin.

The stove was a plain, small cooking-range, rather old and rusty. The strange thing about it was its position. Its abbreviated legs stood upon large cedar posts, which were planted in the floor and were over four feet in height. This brought the stove way up in mid-air, so that the top was about on a level with the face of the colonel, and he was a six-footer.

We formed in a circle about the stove and stared at it as solemnly as a group of priests around a sacrificial tripod. We felt of the posts—they were firm and solid, showing that the mysterious arrangement was a permanent, not a temporary, one. Then we all bent our necks and opened our mouths to look up at the hole in the roof, through which the stovepipe vanished.

Suddenly the stock-broker burst out into a loud laugh.

"Oh, I understand it now," said he.

"Understand what?" asked the colonel, sharply.

"Why Long Tom has his stove hoisted up so high from the floor."

"So do I," said the doctor; but I suspect that my explanation is not the same that any one else would offer."

"Well, I will bet that I am right," said the stock-broker, "and put up the money."

"I am in this," said the judge; "I have a clear idea about that stove, and will back it."

"Make it a jack-pot," said the colonel; "I want to take a hand."

The stock-broker drew a small yellow coin out of his pocket, and dropped it on the table.

"He has the stove up there," he said, "to get a better draught. In this rarified mountain air there is only a small amount of oxygen to the cubic inch, and combustion is more difficult to secure than in the lower latitudes. I have heard that if you get high enough up, you can't cook an egg—that is, I mean, water won't boil—or something like that," he continued, thrown into sudden confusion by the discovery that the professor's eye was fixed upon him with a sarcastic gaze.

"Is that supposed to be science?" demanded the professor.

"Well," said the stock-broker, doggedly, "never mind the reasons. Experience is probably good enough for Long Tom. He finds that he gets a better draught for his stove by having it up in mid-air, so he has it there."

"The right explanation," began the professor, "is the simplest. My idea is that——"

"Excuse me," interrupted the stock-broker, tapping the table; "are you in this pot?"

The professor made a deposit, and proceeded:

"Have you noticed that our host is a very tall man? Like most men of his height, he hates to bend over. If the stove were near the floor, he would have to stoop down low when he whirled a flap-jack or speared a rasher of bacon. Now he can stand up and do it with ease. Your draught theory is no good; the longer the pipe, if it is straight, the better the fire will burn."

"Professor," remarked the colonel, "I regret to have to tell you that your money is gone. Long Tom told me, on the way up, that his partner did all the cooking, and he is a man of rather short stature." The colonel then paid his compliments to the jackpot, and continued: "Now, my idea is that the stove heats the room better there than on the floor. It is only a cooking-stove, to be sure, but when the winter is cold, it makes this room comfortable. Being up in the middle of space, it heats it all equally well, which it could not do if it were down below."

The doctor greeted this theory with a loud laugh. "Colonel," he said, "you are wild—way off the mark. Hot air rises, of course, and the only way to disseminate it is to have your stove as low as possible. According to your idea, it would be a good plan to put the furnace in the attic of a house instead of in the basement."

"I think," said the colonel, "that I could appreciate your argument better if you would ante."

"The pot is mine," said the doctor, as he deposited his coin; "you will all adopt my idea the moment you hear it, and Long Tom, who will be here in a minute, will bear me out. This room is very small; it has but little floor-space, and none of it goes to waste. Now, if he had put the stove down where we expected to find it, Long Tom could not have made use of the area underneath, as you see he has done. On all sides of the supporting posts, you will notice there are hooks, on which he hangs his pans and skillets. Underneath, there is a kitchen-closet for pots and cooking utensils of various sorts. What could be more convenient? Under your ordinary stove there is room only for a poker and a few cockroaches."

The judge, who had been listening to the opinions offered by the others with the same grim smile that occasionally ornamented his face when he announced that an objection was overruled, now stepped forward and dropped a coin on the table. He then rendered his decision as follows:

"It appears that none of you have noticed the forest of hooks in the roof just over the stove. They are not in use at present, but they are there for some purpose. I imagine that during the winter huge pieces of venison and bear's-meat dangle over the stove, and are dried for use later. Now, if the stove were on the floor, it would be too far from the roof to be of service in this way."

"Here comes old Tom," shouted the colonel, who had stepped to the open door while the judge was speaking.

The old trapper put down the various articles of baggage with which his arms were loaded and came into the kitchen-cabin where we all stood. He glanced at the group and then at the stilted stove in our midst.

"I see you air all admirin' my stove," said he, "and I'll bet you've been a-wonderin' why it is up so high."

"Yes, we have," said the professor; "how did you know it?"

"People most allus generally jest as soon as they come into the place begin to ask me about it—that's how I knowed."

"Well, why is it up so high?" demanded the stock-broker impatiently, with a side glance at the well-developed jack-pot on the table.

"The reason's simple enough," said Long Tom, with a grin that showed his bicuspids; "you see we had to pack all this stuff up here from down below on burros. Originally there was four j'ints of that stovepipe, but the cinch wasn't drawed tight enough on the burro that was carryin' them, and two of 'em slipped out and rolled down the mountain. When we got here and found that there wasn't but two pieces left, I reckoned that I would have to kinder h'ist the stove to make it fit the pipe—so I jest in and h'isted her. And thar she is yet. Say, what's all this here money on the table for?"

There was a deep silence which lasted so long that Tom ventured to repeat his question about the money.

"It is a jack-pot," said the doctor, sadly, "and as near as I can make out, it belongs to you."

WHAT SHE NEEDED.

From Wide-Awake.

Indigent people sometimes include strange things under the head of "necessities" when receiving "help" from kindly disposed persons.

The agent of a private relief association once received the following note from a woman in a state of actual destitution. She was the mother of six small children and was one of those unfortunate persons who had seen "better days," and wished her benefactors not to lose sight of that fact:

"Although now sadly reduced in financial circumstances," she wrote, "the time has been when I had an abundance, and I feel keenly the deprivation of many things that would not be missed by persons unaccustomed to them; therefore, in addition to fuel and provisions of all kinds, I desire something in the way of a dressing jacket, in shades of cardinal, and a few invisible hair nets to match the hair inclosed. Also, if you will be so kind, something in the way of fancy shoes for my three little girls, and suitable ties for two boys with blue eyes and fair complexions, and one with dark hair and eyes. A neat and suitable molasses pitcher would also be acceptable and a few skeins of shaded cardinal and green embroidery silk for an unfinished tidy. Thanking you for your interest in my family and your offer of assistance, I am, very truly yours,

CLARA M. B.

HE GOT THE JOB.

From The Toledo Blade.

Farmer Crane, who lives over on the town line, has some very unique methods of examining the men who apply to him from time to time for work.

Last evening a tall, big-boned fellow, in his shirt sleeves, asked Crane if he had any work to do.

"I don't know," said the farmer, "can you 'tend horses?"

"Yes, indeedy, I've worked about horses all my life."

"Come around here to the pump," said Crane, and he led the way to a common sucker-rod pump near the barn. Going inside, he got a long, narrow pitcher, and placed it under the spout. "There," said he, "pump that pitcher full of water." The big-boned fellow complied, carefully pumping the pitcher full without spilling a single drop.

"That'll do," said Crane. "Go inside and get ready for supper; "I'll give you a job in the morning."

About a week later the big-boned fellow asked Crane what pumping the pitcher full of water had to do with his getting a job.

"Well, I'll just tell you. This is mighty dry weather, and water is getting scarce. You must have thought that far, for you didn't spill any water. If you hadn't pumped hard the water would have been spilled; and if you had pumped too hard the water would have gone over the pitcher. Now, the way I argue is this: If a fellow don't pump hard enough, he won't work hard enough. If he pumps too hard, he'll work too hard for a little while, and I don't want either kind to work for me. You pumped exactly right, and you got a job."